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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

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MEMORANDUM

Somalia: Stability of the Regime

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President Siad continues to dominate the Somali scene, and he probably will remain in power for at least the near term. The crafty and durable Siad has managed to keep his opponents divided and off balance and has proven adept at playing off factions against each other. While Siad's position has improved since his defeat in the Ogaden and a subsequent coup attempt in 1978, tribalism and the poor state of the economy continue to pose problems for his regime. If Siad allows these problems to fester, they will offer opportunities for exploitation by his opponents.

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Tribalism Issue

After Siad came to power in a military coup in 1969, he launched a campaign to eradicate tribalism in Somali society. Tribalism itself was banned by law, and attempts were made to alter or end many tribal-related customs. Siad, who was then attempting to consolidate his position, believed that tribal divisions undercut the stability of his regime and the basic principle of Somali policy--the integration into the country of ethnic Somali-inhabited parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.

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His efforts succeeded only in pushing the issue to the background. A number of clans, such as the Majertain, continued to resent the loss of privileged positions they held under the civilian government. In

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April 1978, the Majertain moved to capitalize on Siad's military defeat by Ethiopian and Cuban forces in the Ogaden by mounting a coup; this was easily defeated. Siad countered by purging hundreds of Majertain and others of questionable loyalty from the armed forces and bureaucracy. He replaced them with fellow Marahens and members of allied clans whom he believed would be more loyal. Siad also attempted to isolate the Majertains from their traditional allies and other disaffected elements in Somali society. []

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Siad's reliance on the Marahen, however, soon caused problems with other clans who resented his favoritism and their exclusion from the national scene. Some groups, such as the Issak, threatened to oppose Siad and his policies openly unless they were given a greater share of important posts. Siad has attempted to respond to their demands, especially with the establishment over the past year of a number of "democratic institutions." Seats in the new parliament, for example, were "unofficially" proportioned among the key clan groupings, and non-Marahen have been appointed to cabinet and high-level party posts. Through these methods, Siad hopes to give the clans a feeling of prestige and a sense of participation in the government and its decisionmaking process. Siad also has attempted to rally disaffected Somali clans by emphasizing his support for the ethnic Somali guerrillas in Ethiopia's Ogaden region. His aid to the guerrillas is also intended in part to maintain the support of the Ogadeni clans or at least prevent their alliance with his enemies. []

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Since 1978, Siad has generally been successful in his balancing act. He has proven adept at playing off tribes against each other, offering or appearing to offer concessions when necessary. As a result, there is no organized opposition to his regime within Somalia, although a small Majertain-dominated guerrilla force--the Somali Salvation Front--based in Ethiopia has conducted limited operations within Somalia. The group's acceptance of Ethiopian assistance and its narrow clan makeup have weakened its appeal to the Somali populace. The continued existence of tribalism, despite the 10-year campaign to eradicate it, however, presents an area that could be exploited by anti-Siad elements. The Majertain, for example, have been trying to recruit disaffected Issak and Dulbahante to their cause. []

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The Economy

Since the mid-1970s, the Somali economy has declined as a result of mismanagement, the lingering effects of a drought, stagnating exports, and the rising cost of oil. The decline further accelerated last year, and the nation faces greater financial problems than at any time since

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the 1969 revolution. Siad has failed in his frequent attempts to secure sizable amounts of economic assistance from fellow members of the Arab League, in part because of his support for the Camp David accords. The continuing flood of refugees--over 600,000 from the Ogaden--also has weakened the economy. Although international organizations have helped Somalia cope with the refugee problem, the influx has put a further drain on two scarce resources--food and petroleum. As the displaced population continues to grow, Mogadishu will need greater amounts of foreign assistance to provide the basic necessities [redacted]

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Economic ills have yet to generate significant opposition, but the government is aware of the potential for greater popular discontent, especially given the prospect of even larger shortages of food staples. While continuing to advocate scientific socialism, Siad earlier this year replaced ideologues in some key ministries--such as finance--with more pragmatic ministers in an effort to slow the economic downturn and forestall economically inspired unrest. Siad also hopes that his efforts will generate Western investment and long-promised economic assistance from Saudi Arabia; Riyadh has held up aid in the past because of its unhappiness with Somalia's socialist ideology. In addition, the government recently has sought advice and assistance from the International Monetary Fund, but it may find some IMF conditions--a reduction in government borrowing and expenditures--difficult to implement. [redacted]

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The economy and government also suffer from the flight of educated Somali technicians and managers. Because of extremely low pay--most civil servants have not had a pay raise for years--high inflation, and a lack of consumer goods, many educated Somalis take more lucrative positions in the West or in the wealthier Arab states. [redacted]

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Outlook

Although tribal and economic problems present potentially serious dilemmas for Siad, there is little evidence that unrest has reached troublesome proportions in the military, the main pillar of his regime. There almost certainly are some anti-Siad elements in the military, but many key military leaders have tribal ties to Siad and support his anti-Soviet stance and his efforts to improve ties to the West. The government's loyal and relatively competent security apparatus has also shown itself capable of controlling dissent. Siad's success during 1979 in acquiring large amounts of military equipment from Western and Arab sources--enabling him to regain prewar inventories for his army--eliminated a potential area of military unrest. There had been some feeling in the military that Siad was the main obstacle to Western assistance and his

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removal would be necessary before such ties could be established. The growing prospect of solidifying Somali-US ties has worked to undercut this criticism of his policies within the armed forces. Siad may once again find himself in trouble with the military, however, if this relationship fails to fulfill their expectations or if they begin to believe they are carrying a disproportionate share of any economic belt-tightening measures.

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